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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8344th meeting
Thursday, 6 September 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/804)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/804)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/804, which contains a letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I thank the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to brief them on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

As per long-standing practice, I met yesterday with the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of these consultations. In addition, I remain in regular contact with the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and spoke to him this past Tuesday, 4 September.

As the Council was informed in July (see S/2018/745), the OPCW Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. That is an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Efforts to clarify the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic are ongoing. As members are aware, on 10 July the OPCW received a letter from the Syrian Arab Republic in response to questions regarding chemical weapons-related activities conducted at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre. Those questions were attached to a 10 April letter from the OPCW Director-General. The OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team is continuing to analyse the answers provided by the Syrian Arab Republic and will report in due course to the OPCW Executive Council.

The Secretary-General continues to urge cooperation by the Government of Syria with the OPCW in resolving the outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration. As I have noted on many occasions, the confidence of the international community in the full elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme depends upon the OPCW being able to close those outstanding issues. The complete implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) is critical not only to finding a long-overdue end to the ongoing conflict in Syria, but also to stability in the region in the longer term. In this regard, I welcome the news conveyed to me by the Director-General of the renewal of the Tripartite Agreement between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services. This will allow the OPCW to continue its activities in Syria using the same logistics procedures and support as in the past.

As the Council has been previously informed, on 6 July the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued a note entitled "Interim report of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in Syria regarding the incident of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018", which was subsequently circulated to the Security Council through the Secretary-General. On 7 August, the OPCW received a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic that provided comments on the interim report. The Fact-finding Mission (FFM) continues to collect and analyse information with regard to the alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma and will provide a final report on its findings in due course. I reiterate my full support for the integrity and professionalism of the work of the OPCW and its Fact-finding Mission, and look forward to the final report on this incident.

The FFM has also requested and was provided with, documents pertaining to four reported incidents currently under investigation by the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic: two incidents in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017; one

incident in Al-Salamiyah on 9 August 2017; and another incident in Souran on 8 November 2017. The FFM is continuing to translate and analyse the information contained in those documents.

At its fourth special session last June, the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, inter alia, decided that the OPCW Secretariat

> "shall put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic ... in those instances in which the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in Syria determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, as well as cases for which the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism had not issued a report".

On 27 July, the OPCW Director-General provided a report to States parties and to the Secretary-General on the initial implementation of the decision. The Secretary-General has taken note of the decision adopted at the OPCW Conference of States Parties in June and looks forward to the Director-General's next progress report, which will be issued to the OPCW's Executive Council at its eighty-ninth session, next month.

The lack of a mechanism to attribute responsibility to those who have used chemical weapons has been deeply troubling and a missing step on the path towards accountability. The closure of the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was mandated to identify the perpetrators of such acts, emboldened those who sought to carry out further attacks. Anyone who uses chemical weapons must be identified and held to account.

The Security Council holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, which is threatened by the use of weapons of mass destruction. The adoption of the June decision in the OPCW, therefore, does not lessen the need for unity in the Security Council. The Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed his willingness to assist the Council, and I reiterate his calls on Council members to work together to find a common approach to tackling this issue, which has become one of the most critical challenges to the maintenance of international peace and security. Like the Secretary-General, the Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist.

I would like to recall the remarks made by the Secretary-General in this Chamber on 14 April, when he stated: "Any use of chemical weapons is abhorrent, and the suffering it causes is horrendous" (*S/PV.8233, p. 2*). In that regard, I underline that the use of any toxic chemical, such as chlorine, as a weapon by any party and under any circumstances is totally unacceptable.

Last week, the Secretary-General expressed his deep concern about the growing risks of a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of a full-scale military operation in Idlib province. Before concluding, I wish to reiterate that it is of vital importance that humanitarian principles be upheld, that all relevant international disarmament and non-proliferation norms — most importantly the Chemical Weapons Convention — be fully respected, and that all sides work together to avoid further escalation in Syria, including in and around Idlib.

The President: I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members wishing to make a statement.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her informative briefing and you, Madam President, for having organized this discussion in an open format. Transparency and openness are extremely important and necessary for objective discussions with sober assessments of exact recent or ongoing developments. We certainly need such a thorough approach, especially in the investigation of incidents related to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The reports of the Fact-finding Mission on the Syrian Arab Republic do not yet provide us with the necessary clarity and objectivity, generating further disagreement among Council members.

The position of Kazakhstan on this issue remains firm and consistent. We do not tolerate the use of any kind of weapon of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. We support the prompt identification and prosecution of all those responsible for chemical crimes. However, the involvement of a party must be proved by full, comprehensive and irrefutable evidence.

The issues of attribution and prosecution have long represented a stumbling block in the work of the Council. This impasse has prevented us from achieving effective solutions. We, the members of the Council, must rise above our geopolitical interests. Instead of polarizing the deliberations with our views and prejudices, we must all think seriously about further joint and integrated action.

We must remember that the political settlement of the Syrian crisis and the fight against the threat of chemical weapons in Syria are closely interrelated. We must not allow chemical incidents, deliberately organized for destructive purposes, to undermine our achievements in the political dimension and detract from the prospects for long-awaited peace in Syria. Existing threats should be considered in that context.

In the report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) before us today (see S/2018/804), we see both positive aspects and cause for concern. We agree with the Secretary-General that the long-awaited destruction of all 27 chemical weapon-production facilities in Syria is an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The report also indicates certain progress in obtaining answers from the Syrian Government on issues regarding its chemical weapons declaration. We look forward to the further cooperation of the Government of Syria with the OPCW in order to eliminate all remaining ambiguities. We eagerly await the results of the analysis by the Declaration Assessment Team of the responses submitted by the Syrian authorities.

At the same time, we are very concerned about other circumstances. Questions remain unclear in the following areas.

There is a lack of clarity about all ongoing investigations of chemical incidents, including the Douma incident, which would allow us to see how and by whom chemical weapons have been used and seriously affected the common people of Syria.

The lack of impunity and absence of preventive measures do not allow us to effectively address the continued threat of chemical-weapons use in the country or the fear that chemical attacks are not only being used as a tactical tool of warfare and liquidation of the enemy, which is also unacceptable in our times, but also as an instrument of terror that sows chaos among people to achieve certain benefits for one particular party.

The provocative nature of such actions is a real threat to our collective efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Syrian Arab Republic. We should not allow the politicization and polarization of this serious matter, on which the fate of many depends. We must also fight intentional provocations and planned deliberate attacks.

Kazakhstan calls for constructive and patient consultations and the tireless search for mutually acceptable solutions for the benefit of the people of Syria.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for the valuable information she has provided.

Peru condemns any use of chemical weapons. We believe that such a practice constitutes, in and of itself, a threat to international peace and security, a heinous crime and a flagrant violation of the non-proliferation regime and international humanitarian law. With that in mind, we note with deep concern the recurrent allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we are keeping a close eye on the results of the investigations being carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We believe it to be critical that such investigations be able to identify the perpetrators of those serious crimes, with a view to guaranteeing accountability and access to justice, as well as the effectiveness of an international rules-based order.

On that note, we wish to reaffirm our full confidence in the professional work being carried out by the OPCW in Syria and our recognition of the dedication of its personnel in particularly difficult conditions. We note some progress, such as the completion of the process of destruction of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities recognized by the Syrian Government.

We regret, however, that those advances are continually overshadowed by systematic errors and omissions in Syria's declaration, five years after its accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We hope that the documentation recently provided by the Syrian Government, which is currently under evaluation by the OPCW, will finally make it possible to clear up the existing discrepancies.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that Peru will continue to be guided by a comprehensive evaluation of the situation and by our ongoing commitment to international law and the protection of civilians on this matter.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs for her clear and enlightening briefing.

It is no secret that this meeting is taking place against an extremely worrying backdrop, in the light of which I will make three series of observations regarding the threat of a large-scale offensive in Idlib, potentially involving the use of chemical weapons; the state of play of the Syrian chemical file; and lastly, the urgenct need a political solution and the priority that must be given to the protection of civilians.

Let us get straight to the facts. Syria is once again on the brink of an abyss. I would ask everyone here to carefully consider what a major attack on Idlib would mean. There are nearly 3 million inhabitants in the city, more than half of whom are internally displaced. Such an attack, in the context that I have just outlined, would have disastrous humanitarian, migratory and security consequences that would open a new chapter in the long Syrian tragedy. Such an attack would indeed produce an absolute humanitarian tragedy, with deadly attacks on civilians, indiscriminate air raids and the use of prohibited weapons, notably chemical weapons, by the regime, while civilians would have nowhere to go. Such an attack would also generate a major migration crisis towards northern Syria, Turkey and potentially Europe and beyond. Finally, such a major attack would pose a serious threat to regional security, particularly through the spread of jihadist fighters, who are also in the area.

In the light of the threat of such a disaster, we are fully mobilized and wholly determined. The priority of our collective efforts must be to respect the ceasefire in the area, and today, on behalf of France, I call on Russia and Iran to use their influence on the Syrian regime to achieve that. The supporters of Damascus have the means to prevent such a crisis, because the regime cannot act alone.

We also remain extremely vigilant in the light of the risk of chemical weapons use. As we have said on several occasions, notably alongside the United Kingdom and the United States, any new and verified use of such weapons by the Bashar Al-Assad regime would not go unpunished. Our political leaders have expressed themselves unambiguously on that point.

As I said, there is currently a particularly serious and high risk of such activity. It is no secret that the Syrian regime has not stopped using chemical weapons since 2013, in violation of its international commitments and of the most essential principles, values and rules of law. The regime has pursued its strategy of crushing any opposition by resorting to the most terrifying weapons, while conducting a cynical campaign of misinformation that is propagated by its allies.

Hundreds of civilians paid the price for that in Douma, in April, as well as in Khan Shaykhun, one year earlier, in April 2017. I remind those who would once again try to deny or qualify the reality of the facts or to try and cause confusion that the regime of Bashar Al-Assad has already been formally identified, on several occasions, as having the capacity to use sarin, chlorine and gas on civilians — capacity that it has used.

Let there be no mistake — the Syrian chemical weapons programme has not been dismantled. The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria is an irrefutable indication that stocks of both sarin and chlorine exist. We have taken note of the reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) noting the destruction of all declared facilities and the transmission of information by the Syrian regime. However, I remind the Council that the regime has never sincerely cooperated with the OPCW and that, to date, it remains impossible to confirm if the regime declared all of its inventories and capacities in 2013.

In that edifying context, we therefore call on Syria's allies to take full responsibility for preventing further escalation and banning the use of chemical weapons. The meeting of the Astana Group countries tomorrow must establish clear commitments on their part to maintaining the ceasefire of which they are guarantors; avoiding a military escalation, which would be disastrous in humanitarian terms; and protecting civilians in an area that, I recall, is supposed to be a de-escalation zone.

Such action is imperative for Syria and for the international community. The re-emergence of weapons of terror poses a serious threat to the security of each of our countries and to the entire non-proliferation regime. We therefore have a collective moral, legal and political responsibility to prevent and deter the use of such weapons. The perpetrators of chemical atrocities in Syria and elsewhere must know that they cannot act with impunity and that they will be held accountable. That is the goal of the international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons and the mechanism for identifying those responsible being

established in The Hague t. It is also one of the reasons for our support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which must be able to complete its work. There can be no lasting peace without justice.

In conclusion, I stress once again the particular gravity of the current situation, the responsibility incumbent upon us all to act, and the importance of fully mobilizing the Council and, more broadly, the international community to that end. The military preparations under way in Idlib and the presence within that enclave of a concentration of terrorist fighters and several million civilians, including many displaced persons, are creating conditions that could lead to a humanitarian and security disaster that we must and can prevent together if we pool our efforts. Such a scenario would seriously undermine all the efforts under way to find a political solution, under the auspices of United Nations mediation and with the support of the Council, and would represent a major setback.

The priority must be to respect the ceasefire, the protection of civilians and full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. France therefore calls on the Astana guarantors to maintain the de-escalation and avoid the escalation of violence, with the primary concern being to protect civilian populations. We are at a crossroads. We can either once again plunge into chaos or rally around United Nations mediation led by Staffan de Mistura, which provides us with a way out by promoting the establishment of a constitutional committee in the coming weeks — the cornerstone of a lasting political solution that, if we are able to pool our efforts, is within reach. Let us therefore not allow the conflict to regress into violent escalation.

We will have an opportunity to rally together at the upcoming session of the General Assembly. On behalf of France, I call on everyone today to rise as one to the occasion. It is in our and the Syrians' best interests.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing. We express our gratitude to the Technical Secretariat, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their professional work and commitment to serving our common goal of a world free of chemical weapons. Let me reiterate that Poland takes note of the fact that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of all declared chemical weapons-production facilities. At the same time, we hope that communication between the OPCW and Syria will continue so that all existing gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies with regard to the Syrian initial declaration can be clarified. We also thank the Fact-finding Mission for its interim report on activities related to the incident in Douma. We are looking forward to the Mission's final report.

We are already discussing the fifty-ninth OPCW report today, which means that for almost five years the Security Council and international community have been unable to mitigate the threat posed by chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. It does not mean, however, that this body is incapable of doing so. The establishment of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism demonstrated that, when the Council is united around the common goal of countering weapons of mass destruction, it can work effectively.

Poland continues to condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, including in Syria, and is firmly convinced that those responsible for chemical attacks must be held accountable. It is crucial to preserving the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Therefore, we are looking forward to the development by the OPCW of arrangements necessary to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, in accordance with the decision of the fourth special session of the Conference of States Parties to the CWC.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The tenor of the discussion in the Security Council on the topic of the chemical demilitarization of Syria does not align with the actual state of affairs and derives from the persistent anti-Damascus attitudes of Western members of the Council. The Syrian military chemical potential was destroyed some time ago under the monitoring of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The organization in The Hague also confirmed the destruction of the last declared production facilities, in accordance with the Convention on the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). We agree with the Secretary-General that that was an

important step towards the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Gaps and inconsistencies in the Syrian declaration are attributable to the fact that it was submitted under the pressure of time constraints, against the backdrop of an acute armed conflict. Subsequently, clarifications were made in full compliance with CWC rules. Some issues can no longer be clarified, given the number of years that have elapsed and must be put to rest. With regard to other issues, the Government of Syria has provided the OPCW in good faith with available information, and such interaction is the only way to resolve remaining misunderstandings. There is no foundation to allegations that Damascus allegedly retained elements from stocks of toxic substances. That is pure propaganda. Suffice it to recall that OPCW experts have inspected the research centre in Barzah very thoroughly on two occasions and found no trace of toxic substances. In April, that facility was destroyed by missile strikes by the United States, the United Kingdom and France under the pretext that it was allegedly producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, but no chemical traces were emitted during the attack. That clearly indicates a large-scale international deception on the part of the participants in the aggression, of a kind with the shameful adventure concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. By the way, for some reason OPCW officials are embarrassed to mention the fact that the centre's destruction was caused by the bombing.

A characteristic feature of the conflict in Syria has been the provocation of militants from illegal armed entities through their use of toxic chemicals. For five years, the same primitive machinations have been used by international elements to discredit the authorities in Damascus and justify subsequent acts of aggression against Syria. Assistance in staging events to provoke an appropriate response is provided by the supposed rescuers, the White Helmets, who are living off Western money. They even use children in staging such events. Following the incident in Douma, this scheme was revealed when we managed to track down participants filming events, and they recounted everything at The Hague.

At present, a new wave of severe threats is being unleashed against Syria. The alleged intention of the Syrian Government to use chemical weapons in Idlib has been presented as fact. Agatha Christie's novel *A Murder is Announced*, in which the crime to be committed — including its time and place — is reported in the newspaper, comes to mind. The expectations of those who are curious and visit the address published by the newspaer are not disappointed. Contemporary prophets do not bother explaining why Damascus needs to poison its civilian population with gas in an environment in which Syria has already been bombed twice, and new acts of aggression are being hatched. Do others really believe that Damascus has called on them to do that? Do they really think that the whole world blindly believes those stories? Damascus has no chemical weapons and no plans to use them. We consider such warnings to be invitations to terrorists to stage a new chemical attack and accuse the Syrian authorities of it. The Syrian authorities do not need to do that, but it is key for terrorists, since it is a sure way to provoke an act of aggression against Damascus.

We know for certain, and we have provided the relevant information to the OPCW, that toxic chemicals and equipment for provocation were brought via complicated routes into the territory not controlled by the Syrian authorities; that militants were specially trained by Western special services; that the White Helmets and their allies are already present in Idlib; and that dozens of children in the province have been kidnapped. At the same time, the military presence of key Western countries is demonstratively growing near Syria, and their officials are making aggressive statements. We spoke about that at a meeting of the Security Council on 28 August (see S/PV.8332).

In that regard, we have a concrete proposal for our American colleagues, namely, that they should provide the list of targets that the Pentagon has reportedly identified for possible strikes of the troika. If the United States believes that they are related to the stockpiling and use of chemical weapons, then it must demonstrate its respect for the Charter of the United Nations and international law and inform the OPCW so that it can conduct chemical inspections pursuant to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Since the United States unreservedly believes in the authority and impartiality of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, its expertise should allay any suspicions.

I would like to say a few words about the OPCW. We expect that the new Director-General of the OPCW, Mr. Arias González, will be able to restore the work of the organization to its normal pathway. After numerous remote investigations, its authority has suffered a serious blow. The OPCW was further undermined by the decision that a division of the Technical Secretariat

would identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, which was pushed through by a minority of member States. That was not legitimate because it is not in line with the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and Russia does not recognize it. The sole purpose of that initiative is the purely political aim of undermining Syria and Russia internationally. That was made clear in the parliamentary statement delivered on 5 September by British Prime Minister Theresa May on the Salisbury-Amesbury incident.

Let us remember that pursuing such provoscation will lead only to a new exacerbation of tension in the Near East, which has already been heightened due to the policy carried out be Western countries, resulting in disunity. It is not just a matter of instability, but also of serious military conflicts that claim many innocent victims. It is hardly likely that the West's regional allies will benefit from that.

There was a point in time when questionable geopolitical games led to the proliferation of terrorism. Today, as a result of similar ventures, we are witnessing a surge in chemical terrorism. It is worth noting that the role of those countries in achieving a political settlement in Syria, about which they speak so fervently, is not very high-profile. We highly recommend that they cease hostilities and join in the efforts for peace.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. We welcome the confirmation by the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that the Secretariat has verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Syrian Government. As the Secretary-General states in his letter,

> "the long-awaited completion of the issue constitutes an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013)" (*S/2018/804, p. 1*).

We understand that the OPCW has continued its endeavours to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Government. We also note that the OPCW is still analysing the response of the Syrian Government regarding the outstanding issues. While we await the report, we reiterate that all remaining matters should be resolved through continued and more productive communications between the Syrian Government and the OPCW.

After its interim report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, we note that the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) has continued to collect and analyse information related to the incident. We stress that all parties should cooperate with the FFM in its investigative work. In that regard, we look forward to the final report of the FFM. In addition, we note that the FFM is currently translating and analysing the documents it requested and received from the Syrian Government with regard to four incidents.

Our positions on the use of chemical weapons are well known. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any actor — State or non-State — under any circumstances. There cannot be any justification for using chemicals as weapons. Their use is a threat to international peace and security and endangers the global non-proliferation system. Those who use chemical weapons must be identified, based on robust evidence, and held accountable. We still believe that the unity of the Security Council is vital in that regard. Acting together, according to the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council relevant resolutions, we believe, is the best and most sustainable way to discourage and stop the use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and her team for their substantive briefing.

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the definitive destruction of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The verification of that information was requested in previous meetings, and we should indeed be pleased that the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) made all the arrangements necessary for the verification of that information. It is a significant step forward that should encourage the parties to take concrete steps towards the implementation of the relevant provisions of resolution 2118 (2013), and the members of the Security Council to return to unanimity in addressing this important and sensitive issue.

With regard to the security of OPCW personnel, we believe that access to places of investigation requires that the security of the Mission be guaranteed on a permanent basis, in accordance with the provisions of

the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, held on 26 and 27 June. In that regard, we encourage the OPCW secretariat to implement the new measures aimed at mitigating the high security risks proposed by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security.

The efforts and, above all, the contributions of countries and international organizations to the Trust Fund for Syrian Missions, which currently amounts to €17.1 million, deserve our praise. Those resources should undoubtedly be used to further support the activities of the OPCW in Syria.

Faced with the current context of the terrorist threat in north-western Syria and the offensives of the Syrian Government that are making progress in recovering territories, the parties must continue to consider the importance of upholding international treaties, especially the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is also worth recalling is that the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic should prioritize their cooperation with the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic so that no single case of chemical weapons use goes uninvestigated and that those responsible do not go unidentified.

The principled position of Equatorial Guinea on chemical weapons has not changed. It has always been clear and consistent. We are firmly opposed to the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization, group of States or person in any circumstance. The use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable and intolerable anywhere, at any time.

The Security Council and the OPCW are the primary channels for addressing the problem of Syrian chemical weapons. We recognize the important role they have played, and we hope that the stakeholders will adopt a constructive approach in order to find a solution through direct and unhindered dialogue that can prevent and put a definitive end to any future use of chemical weapons in the Arab Republic of Syria by any party. In that context, it is essential to create a mechanism to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, to make formal accusations against them and to prosecute them. That will require the unity of the Security Council.

In conclusion, I reiterate that in the view of the Government of Equatorial Guinea, it is now understood that a political process is the only viable solution to the problem of the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community must continue cooperating with the parties concerned in order to reach a political solution that respects the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and the territorial integrity of the people of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the briefing of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu.

My delegation reiterates the importance of the verification carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat with regard to the destruction of the last two facilities linked to the production of chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. We agree that the full and verifiable destruction of all such facilities is a key step in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Following the response submitted by the Syrian Government to the OPCW Director-General's letter of 10 April, we are awaiting the analysis and conclusion of the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team on that additional information. We also stress the importance of the United Nations Office for Project Services continuing to support the OPCW Fact-find Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with the Tripartite Agreement.

We welcome the planning of future visits by the OPCW secretariat to the sites identified in the third and fourth reports of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/2016/738 and S/2016/888). We encourage the Secretariat to continue such visits in order to gather evidence that will make it possible to determine the possible use of chemical weapons. To that end, it is essential that any investigation into the use or possible use of chemical weapons, not only on Syrian territory but in any circumstance, should include on-site visits as a critical element, with the aim of conducting conclusive and verifiable investigations. In that connection, we reiterate our support for the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, in accordance with its mandate, to continue its work of investigation and verification of all alleged attacks with chemical weapons in the most objective, methodical and technical manner.

With regard to the incident involving the alleged use of toxic chemical substances as a weapon in the city of Douma, we reiterate the need for the investigation to follow a standard, independent and transparent protocol, with on-site visits as a key element, and we

await the collection and analysis of the information collected by the Fact-finding Mission to confirm the use of chemicals weapons and identify those responsible through the relevant mechanisms and in the framework of the Charter of the United Nations.

We wholeheartedly believe that, regardless of the powers granted to the secretariat and the Director-General of the OPCW at the fourth special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in June, the Council still has the obligation to reach consensus on the creation of an independent, impartial and representative investigative mechanism to carry out a thorough, reliable and conclusive investigation that will make it possible to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable before the courts. We welcome the good offices of the Secretary-General. We believe that all options must be considered in order to reach consensus on this issue.

Finally, we insist that the only way to resolve this conflict is through an inclusive political process of dialogue, led by and on behalf of the Syrian people within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations. That means that we must continue to provide the necessary support for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria and for the establishment of a constitutional committee.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Nakamitsu, for her valuable briefing earlier today.

We welcome the destruction of the last two chemical facilities in Syria. The overall number of chemical facilities that have been destroyed now stands at 27. This is a very important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). We also welcome the reference Ms. Nakamitsu made in her briefing to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, which allows the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to resume the work and shoulder its responsibilities in Syria.

Despite the progress achieved, there remain discrepancies in the details of the chemical programme declared by the Syrian Government. We hope that the answers provided by the Syrian Government in response to the questions posed by the OPCW Director General will contribute to resolving those discrepancies. We call upon the relevant Syrian authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW.

The Security Council is unable to fulfil its responsibilities pertaining to the Syrian chemical programme because it lacks a mechanism, replacing the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. That is attributable to a division among Council members. As a result, many Member States, including Kuwait, have resorted to a different international platform, the OPCW, to fill that vacuum.

A special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Conventionwas held in The Hague, at which it was decided that the OPCW would take on the mandate of identifying the perpetrators of the crime of the use of chemical weapons. We look forward to the OPCW making the necessary arrangements in order to shoulder this responsibility. In that regard, we express our support for the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM), and we commend its work and professionalism. We stress that it is important to cooperate with the FFM and to protect its staff so that they can work in a safe environment. We look forward to the final findings of the FFM soon, including the investigations of the Douma incident in April.

I reiterate the principled and steadfast position of the State of Kuwait in that regard. We condemn any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time and by any party. That is a flagrant violation of international law. We underscore the importance of holding those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to account, be they individuals, entities, non-State actors or Governments.

Our meeting today comes at a critical time, as we are seeing increasing reports and indications of an imminent military escalation in the Idlib governorate, home to nearly 3 million people, half of whom are internally displaced persons. We are particularly concerned about the possible recurrent use of chemical weapons in Syria, and about the repetition in Idlib of the crimes committed in Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere.

We join the Secretary-General in stressing that any use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable. Over the past eight years, the Syrian people have suffered the most brutal humanitarian violations, including the use of chemical weapons against them. That is why we must be united and rise above our differences and divisions in order to prevent such

crimes against humanity and to peacefully resolve the situations in Idlib and in Syria as a whole. Our aim is to stop the bloodshed of our Syrian brethren.

In conclusion, we hope that the summit to be held tomorrow by the Astana guarantors will prevent a humanitarian disaster in Idlib, protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the needy, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her excellent briefing on the issue of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

My delegation's statement will focus on the following two points: the progress made in implementing the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013), and the activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) regarding the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

With regard to the Syrian chemical weapons programme, my delegation welcomes the progress made in destroying all of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities. We believe that such progress is an important step towards the complete destruction of the country's chemical arsenal, and we therefore welcome the cooperation efforts of the Syrian Government. Further proof of this positive trend are the replies made by the Syrian Government to the non-exhaustive list of questions contained in the correspondence of the Director-General of the OPCW, dated 10 April. Those questions concern the initial declaration and the provision to the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of documents relating to the four incidents in which chemical weapons were allegedly used in 2017 in Khirbet Masasnah, Al-Salamiyah and Suran. Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the results of the analysis of those documents will allow us to shed light on those incidents and to identify, where appropriate, the perpetrators of the use of such chemical weapons so that they are held to account before the relevant international courts.

My country welcomes the new powers given to the OPCW, in accordance with the conclusions of the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 26 and 27 June, for the purpose of identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons in Syria. In that regard, my delegation supports the decision of the OPCW Executive Council to take appropriate measures to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons in Syria and to draft a report on all relevant information on the origin of those weapons. We also welcome the publication of the OPCW interim report on the allegations of chemical weapons use in Douma on 7 April, and we look forward to the conclusions of the final report.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on the parties to the conflict in Syria to focus on negotiations as part of an inclusive political dialogue, in accordance with the Geneva process, as mandated for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for her briefing and for all the work that she is doing on this issue with her team. Through her, allow me to thank the staff of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

Like other speakers, we remain deeply concerned about the escalating military action by the Syrian authorities and Russia in north-western Syria. This puts millions of civilians at risk, and the Security Council will discuss that tomorrow. But in that context, we are here today because we are seriously concerned by the potential for further illegal use of chemical weapons in any Syrian regime offensive in Idlib. As other speakers have done, we reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and that it constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

I was very interested in what the High Representative had to say about the review by the OPCW of the Syrian chemical weapons disclosure. I think that she is right to say that some important steps have been made in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, and that there are some very important outstanding issues. As of March, the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic had confirmed 13 cases of likely chemical weapons use in Syria since it was established in 2014. In terms of allegations, the Fact-finding Mission has recorded at least 390. After more than four years of work by the Declaration Assessment Team, the OPCW is still unable to verify that the Syrian declaration is accurate. We have heard many times that there are "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies" in Syria's account of its declaration under the CWC. Those are substantive points.

I do not think that the Council really understands why it is so difficult to resolve this issue. If a State Member of the United Nations were acting in good faith under the Chemical Weapons Convention, these issues would be capable of being resolved, but we still find ourselves confronting them in this Chamber, meeting after meeting. I would also like to state that the last report (see S/2018/745) noted that the list of issues had even increased rather than decreased, and I would like to know why. I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to give us an explanation for that today.

Turning to the risk of the use of chemical weapons over Idlib, and taking into account what the Russian representative said, Agatha Christie was a fiction writer. What is fact is that the Syrian authorities have been found to have used chemical weapons against their own people. What we hear from the Russian Ambassador is an inversion of the facts, an inversion of the concern for the protection of civilians that the Council has mandated, an inversion of what the rules-based international order of multilateralism is all about, and fundamentally, an inversion of what Governments are supposed to do as their first duty to protect their people and to keep their people safe. I just find it unconscionable, that after all these years, in the hundredth anniversary year of the end of the First World War, that any Government can even think of using chemical weapons against its own people or, indeed, against anyone else, whether they are a small city in Britain or a country like Syria.

I reject everything that the Russian Ambassador said about aggression on the part of three permament members of the Security Council. What France, the United Kingdom and the United States are aiming to do is to uphold the rules-based international order. People who worry about action by our three Governments should take every possible step to ensure that chemical weapons are not used, and then there will be no problem at all. We have demonstrated that we will respond swiftly and appropriately to any further use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, which has already had such devastating humanitarian consequences for the Syrian population. Once again, I join others in urging Russia to use its influence to ensure that chemical weapons are not used against civilians in Syria. Either Russia calls for restraint or Russia will be deemed complicit in their use when these weapons are used.

I want to conclude, if I may, by saying that I could not agree more with the representative of Equatorial Guinea about the primacy of the political process, and I hope that those efforts can be redoubled over the coming weeks.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): As this is the first time this month that I am speaking at a meeting of the Security Council, allow me to congratulate your country, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for September. I also thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

As was confirmed in the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2018/804), which was transmitted to the Security Council by Secretary-General Guterres, all 27 declared chemical weapons-production facilities in Syria have been destroyed. We also note that, as we speak, the OPCW is still studying the responses from the Syrian Government in relation to some of the outstanding questions concerning its initial chemical weapons declaration. We hope that the OPCW will continue to strengthen its communication and coordination with the Syrian Government in an effort to duly resolve the relevant issues.

The Chinese delegation notes some recent reports that hint at possible chemical weapons attacks within Syrian. I want to reiterate that China resolutely opposes the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual in any circumstances or for any purpose, and advocates severe punishment of the perpetrators. At the same time, we believe that all alleged chemical weapons incidents must undergo comprehensive, objective and impartial investigations so as to ensure that they are based on conclusive evidence and that conclusions are in line with the facts and can stand the test of time. Until then, we should not predetermine the outcomes.

China consistently advocates respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and opposes the wilful use or threat of use of force in international affairs. Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected.

The only way out of the Syrian impasse is through a political settlement. We hope that all parties concerned will, in a constructive spirit and through dialogue and consultation, seek solutions that preserve the unity of the Security Council and help to advance the political process in Syria.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Let me begin by thanking Ms. Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

I will focus on three points: first, the developments in Idlib; secondly, the use of chemical weapons; and thirdly, the need for attribution and accountability.

First, with regard to the developments in Idlib, as others before me have said, we are extremely concerned about the escalation of violence in Idlib due to recent air strikes. The risk of a further escalation of violence is deeply concerned. Such an escalation would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe, with major regional consequences. The Council has the responsibility to prevent that worst-case scenario.

Let me repeat our key messages. All warring parties must abide by existing Security Council resolutions. A military offensive in Idlib would put at risk the lives of more than 3 million civilians living in the region and result in a new humanitarian catastrophe. The guarantors of the Idlib de-escalation zone and the Syrian regime need to work towards a peaceful, non-violent, negotiated solution for Idlib. Any measure to counter terrorism must comply with obligations under international law, in particular human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. Combating terrorism is no excuse to target without distinction or proportionality. Parties need to uphold international humanitarian law throughout Syria, and in particular in Idlib, and provide humanitarian access to those in need. Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, including in Idlib. It is prohibited by international law and would have devastating human and humanitarian consequences. We support the call of the Secretary-General for restraint in the use of force, with the protection of citizens as the first priority.

Secondly, with regard to chemical weapons, we thank the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for its fifty-ninth report (see S/2018/804). We support the objective and professional work of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and call on all warring parties in Syria to continue their efforts to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can continue its work independently. The Kingdom of the Netherlands looks forward to the final report on the attack in Douma on 7 April.

We condemn the recent trend of spreading deliberate disinformation on chemical weapons attacks, including in the Council, to create confusion. There is no credible information supporting the allegations of one Council member against the White Helmets and against Western countries. In our view, the Security Council should focus on common ground. We all condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances; we all agree that impunity must be countered to defend the international non-proliferation architecture; and we all agree on the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permitted. Together, we should reinforce the international norm that chemical weapons should never be used again.

My third point is about attribution and accountability. Let me refer to the points made by our Kuwaiti colleague on the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and reiterate the importance of the outcome of the special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 27 June. There an overwhelming majority of States members of the OPCW reconfirmed and strengthened the standard against the use of chemical weapons.

We once again plead for follow-up to the conclusions of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission and its future attribution mechanism by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We remain convinced that the OPCW can make an important contribution to fighting impunity in Syria by sharing information with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, the people of Syria have suffered far too long. They have suffered from mass atrocities, violence and the use of chemical weapons. Working with all possible instruments inside and outside the Council, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue its efforts to achieve accountability for those crimes.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I want first to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for her briefing.

During the conflict in Syria, we have witnessed numerous systematic and flagrant violations of international law, including violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, by all parties to the conflict andparticularly by Syrian forces. Chemical weapons have been used repeatedly. We condemn such use in the strongest terms. It is a serious violation of international law and constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Such use in armed

conflict amounts to a war crime. The proliferation and use of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors alike must end and those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable. Impunity is not and will not be an option.

We therefore supported the decision of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention at its special session to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. While a mechanism established by the Council would have been preferable, the issue was too important to be allowed to be blocked indefinitely. That does not, however, as has been stated in the Council previously, relieve the Council of its responsibility.

I want to make a few remarks with regard to the latest progress report (see S/2018/804) on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria from the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

First, we note that the Declaration Assessment Team is analysing the response of the Syrian authorities to the questions regarding the outstanding issues. Let me emphasize that all open issues must be closed without further delay. All remaining chemical weapons must be declared and destroyed, in line with resolution 2118 (2013). We urge the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully and actively with the OPCW so that the accuracy and completeness of its declaration can ultimately be verified.

Secondly, we would like to reiterate our full support for the OPCW and our complete confidence in the independent, impartial and professional work of its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We look forward to the upcoming reports regarding a number of pending investigations, including the final report on the alleged attack in Douma.

Finally, we note the intention of the Director General to issue a second progress report, ahead of the October session of the OPCW Executive Council, on the implementation of the decision of the special session regarding attribution for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We look forward to the Security Council being kept informed on that important matter.

We are alarmed by the signs of a possible military offensive in north-western Syria. Idlib is a de-escalation area, established by the Astana guarantors. However, one after the other of the de-escalation areas has turned into escalation areas. A full-scale military offensive would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. Idlib is different from other areas. There is nowhere to flee. There are 3 million civilians living there, including 1 million children and internally displaced persons.

All parties, including Syrian allies, need to be reminded of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects, and to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and avoidance of unnecessary suffering. We therefore urge all parties to abide by the de-escalation agreement in Idlib and the Astana guarantors to uphold their commitments regarding de-escalation and humanitarian access. We must ensure that Idlib will not become the next Aleppo or eastern Ghouta. It is vital that Russia, Turkey and Iran find a way during their meeting tomorrow to avoid further escalation. This Council also has a preventive role to avoid a disaster, and together with Kuwait and all other members of the Council, we stand ready to explore all meaningful options in that regard.

I express our alarm about allegations that chemical weapons may be used again and remind all parties of the clear and absolute prohibition on the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances. It is more critical than ever than we avoid escalation and revert to the track of diplomacy for a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate our total support for the United Nations-led political process and the indefatigable efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. A sustainable political solution is the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people after more than seven years of conflict.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

History's verdict on the conflict in Syria is not yet written. There have been plenty of missteps, miscalculations and willful negligence throughout the course of the war. There has been evil, there has been honour and many things in between. I would say that it should be cause for deep shame on the part of those members of the Council that have fought relentlessly to shield the Al-Assad regime from accountability. Instead, those members have made a clear display of

their cynicism, their penchant for brutality and their lack of capacity for shame.

Still the competition for how the Syrian war will be remembered — as an example of humanity at its worst or at its best — goes on. Today's meeting is devoted to chemical weapons, but we should make no mistake — an Al-Assad regime offensive on Idlib would be a reckless escalation even if chemical weapons were not used. It is up to Russia to keep this from happening, and we will discuss the humanitarian consequences of the Idlib offensive in greater detail tomorrow. In the meantime, the Russian Federation has recently been building up its naval forces off the coast of Syria, signaling that Moscow is pre-positioning itself once again to abet the murder and mayhem of the Al-Assad regime. As on numerous occasions in the past, there are signs that the Assad regime is planning to use chemical weapons to finish off the siege of Idlib.

As in the past, the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies are spreading lies about who is behind chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Their claims are baseless. They are the definition of fake news. In fact, if the past is any guide, the Syrian and Russian attempts to blame others for the use of chemical agents are an indication that the Syrian regime still believes that it can use these horrific weapons with impunity, and an indication that the Syrian regime may be preparing to use these horrific weapons in future attacks. No one — I repeat — no one is fooled.

Here are the terrible facts of the war in Syria. Five years ago, the Al-Assad regime launched missiles containing a cocktail of deadly gas at the people of Ghouta, killing 1,429 people. On 4 April 2017, the Al-Assad regime dropped sarin gas from the sky on the people of Khan Shaykhun. The attack killed over 70 innocent Syrians, including dozens of children. An independent investigative group, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), found the Al-Assad regime responsible for the attack. The fact that the Russians later succeeded in killing the JIM does not change its conclusions. Their findings were credible and definitive. Al-Assad killed his own people with chemical weapons at Khan Shaykhun.

Then, in April 2018, over 40 people died and hundreds received treatment for exposure to chemical weapons in Douma. In all, the United States estimates, conservatively, that the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons on its own people at least 50 times since the war began. That amounts easily, conservatively, to 1,500 innocent children, women and men killed by the Syrian regime with chemical weapons — 1,500 murders covered up by the Russian regime and 1,500 reasons to disbelieve the claims that others are responsible for the atrocities.

As these ridiculous claims are repeated again and again, I ask everyone listening to remember that the Syrians' and Russians' lies do not exonerate them. The Syrians' and Russians' lies only reveal Al-Assad's guilt. The United States will not stop pushing back forcefully against these lies. We will not abandon the Syrian people.

Along with France, the United States has announced new sanctions against individuals and entities that support Al-Assad's chemical and conventional weapons programme. In June, the special sssion of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention decided that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should identify the perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria. Even though the United States believes that the primary responsibility for addressing the use of chemical weapons belongs to the Security Council, we welcome this decision. Anything that brings us closer to bringing the Al-Assad regime to account for its crimes enhances the security not just of the Syrian people but of us all.

In referencing accountability, we have a message for the Al-Assad regime and anyone contemplating using chemical weapons in Syria. In the past, 18 months I have spoken in this Chamber twice promising that the United States would respond to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Both times, my Administration followed through. The United States and its allies forced the Al-Assad regime to pay the price for its crimes. We therefore want to take this opportunity to remind Al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian partners that they do not want to bet against the United States responding again.

The story of the war in Syria is still being written. There is still time for those who believe in human dignity to shape history. There is still time for the nations of the world to come to their aid. And there is still time for those who would commit additional acts of human savagery to reconsider their actions. The choice is theirs and it will dictate our response in the time and the manner of our choosing.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Some representatives have talked today about the existence of chemical weapons in Syria. Their talk is misleading and irresponsible because there are no longer any chemical weapons in Syria. There have been none since Ms. Sigrid Kaag announced before the Security Council in 2014 that there were no more chemical weapons in Syria

In her briefing today, Ms. Nakamitsu welcomed the destruction of all the 27 chemical weapon facilities in Syria, as well as the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, which allows the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to continue its work in Syria. It would seem that this information has fallen on the deaf ears of certain colleagues who still insist in this Chamber on waiting for the arrival of someone named Godot who never arrives for decades, like in the absurdist play by Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*.

The threatening language used in the Security Council will have no impact, especially if it is coming from the presidency. We are diplomats and our task is to prevent wars and threats while searching for diplomatic solutions to international crises. That is our understanding as diplomats and as ambassadors. The Security Council is not a battleground. The Council has made several mistakes in Iraq and Libya, and it is about time to learn from our mistakes.

When my and other delegations first saw the programme of work for the month of September, we were convinced that certain permanent members did not want the Security Council to live up to its mandate of maintaining international peace and security; rather, those members are prepared to stop at nothing to exploit the Security Council and the working instruments of the United Nations to pursue their own political gains, to the detriment of maintaining international peace and security.

There are Governments of permanent members of the Security Council that have abdicated their responsibilities and become parties that are politically, morally and legally unqualified to defend international peace and security. To be clearer, I would say that any party that protects and covers up the Israeli nuclear, biological and chemical arsenal; uses pretexts to maintain its own chemical arsenals; destroyed Iraq by hiding behind the weapons-of-mass-destruction lie; withdrew from the international agreement with Iran; stopped funding United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and withdrew from UNESCO; and continues to put pressure on United Nations funding while also threatening to withdraw from the World Trade Organization, has no right to launch forged and false accusations against my country, Syria, of using chemical weapons, especially if it has an historical record replete with established and non-fabricated facts about its own use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons against civilians in many parts of the world.

Speaking of lies and fabrications, I would like to share with the Council the details of a comic and shameful television report that was prepared by a CNN reporter called Arwa Damon, who, in Turkey, met the self-styled victims of the alleged chemical attack in Douma in April. That alleged attack was used as a pretext by the American, British and French Governments, as Council members recall, for their tripartite aggression against Syria on Saturday, 14 April. Immediately following that aggression, there was a meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.8233).

Going back to the television report in Turkey, hundreds of kilometres far from the site of the alleged incident that supposedly occurred in Douma, the CNN reporter met with the so-called victims just one week after the alleged attack. The reporter said that she smelled the strange and stinky odour of a chemical substance emanating from a school bag belonging to a child in Turkey to justify the military aggression against Syria. What a level of political and media decline!

Council members are aware of the fact that Syria and its allies are engaged in a ferocious battle against terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front, as well as affiliated terrorist organizations. Members are explicitly and implicitly convinced that we do not need to use internationally prohibited weapons to eliminate terrorism. Members know for sure that we have waged war against international terrorism on behalf of their peoples and Governments. We will not yield to shameful political blackmail or to the threats of direct military aggression posed by the Governments of the United States, Britain and France. Those Governments have engaged in every kind of prohibited act in Syria, supported takfiri

terrorism and given orders to the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and its affiliated groups and organizations, in particular the White Helmets, to use chemical weapons against civilians in Syria in order to accuse the Syrian Government and find a pretext to launch a further military aggression.

We in Syria are fighting Al-Qaida on our territories, not in Washington, D.C., New York, London or Paris. We are fighting Al-Qaida itself, which was responsible for the aggression of 11 September 2001 in New York City. We are fighting Al-Qaida, which has attacked Paris, London and many European capitals. However, some members of the Council are rewarding us by supporting Al-Qaida against us, while we have been fighting Al-Qaida on their behalf and their peoples' behalf.

Those in this Chamber who are supposed to uphold international law and the legitimacy of the Charter should ask themselves why Syria would use an internationally prohibited weapon that we do not possess it and that does not yield a real military benefit. Why would we do that? It is simply being used as a pretext for the three aggressors to wage one aggression after another against us. Why is it that the chemical weapon allegedly used only impacts women and children and not terrorists? How are the Governments of the three aggressors able to predict the place, date and kind of chemical weapon that is going to be used in Syria? Why are these Governments are in sync with the terrorists of the Al-Nusra Front and the White Helmets regarding the predictability of the time and place of an attack? Why are the Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weappons (OPCW) unable to deal with the information provided by Syria?

In that regard, in recent years Syria has sent 156 official letters to the Security Council and the OPCW regarding the toxic chemical weapons that are possessed, stockpiled and prepared by terrorist armed groups in Syria to be used against civilians in order to accuse the Syrian army of using them. Nobody reads or wants to read those letters. Nobody wants to cooperate with the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and stop the terrorist groups from using chemical weapons. Why? Because some people are opposed to resolving the problem in Syria and want to invest in terrorism.

We have many questions to ask, and the answers are already known. Those three Governments have failed over the past eight years to achieve their goal in Syria by supporting terrorism. That is why those three Governments are carrying out their actions today openly and flagrantly. They are conducting direct military aggression against Syria and illegally deploying military forces in parts of my country. Those Governments are hindering the political process in Geneva, Astana and Sochi. They will try to prevent the eradication of terrorism in Idlib and other places, continue to impose a suffocating economic embargo on the Syrian people, block the funding of Syria's reconstruction and recovery, and prevent the repatriation of Syrian refugees and displaced persons so that they can live a dignified, safe and peaceful life.

I would like to underscore the fact that, following the destruction of the two last facilities, to which Ms. Nakamitsu referred earlier, and the dispatch of the OPCW Fact-find Mission to verify their destruction and clear the debris from the two sites, the Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all its obligations by destroying all sites related to the production of chemical weapons.

The Government of my country confirms that two days ago it sent an official letter to the members of the Security Council containing precise and highly credible information about preparations under way by terrorist groups in Idlib and in the suburbs of Latakia and Aleppo in connection with toxic chemical substances to be widely used against civilians, with a view to hampering the military operation against terrorism in those areas.

Lastly, it is all too clear and sad that certain permanent members of the Security Council, including the current presidency, have conflated the actual topic of today's meeting with that of tomorrow's meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.